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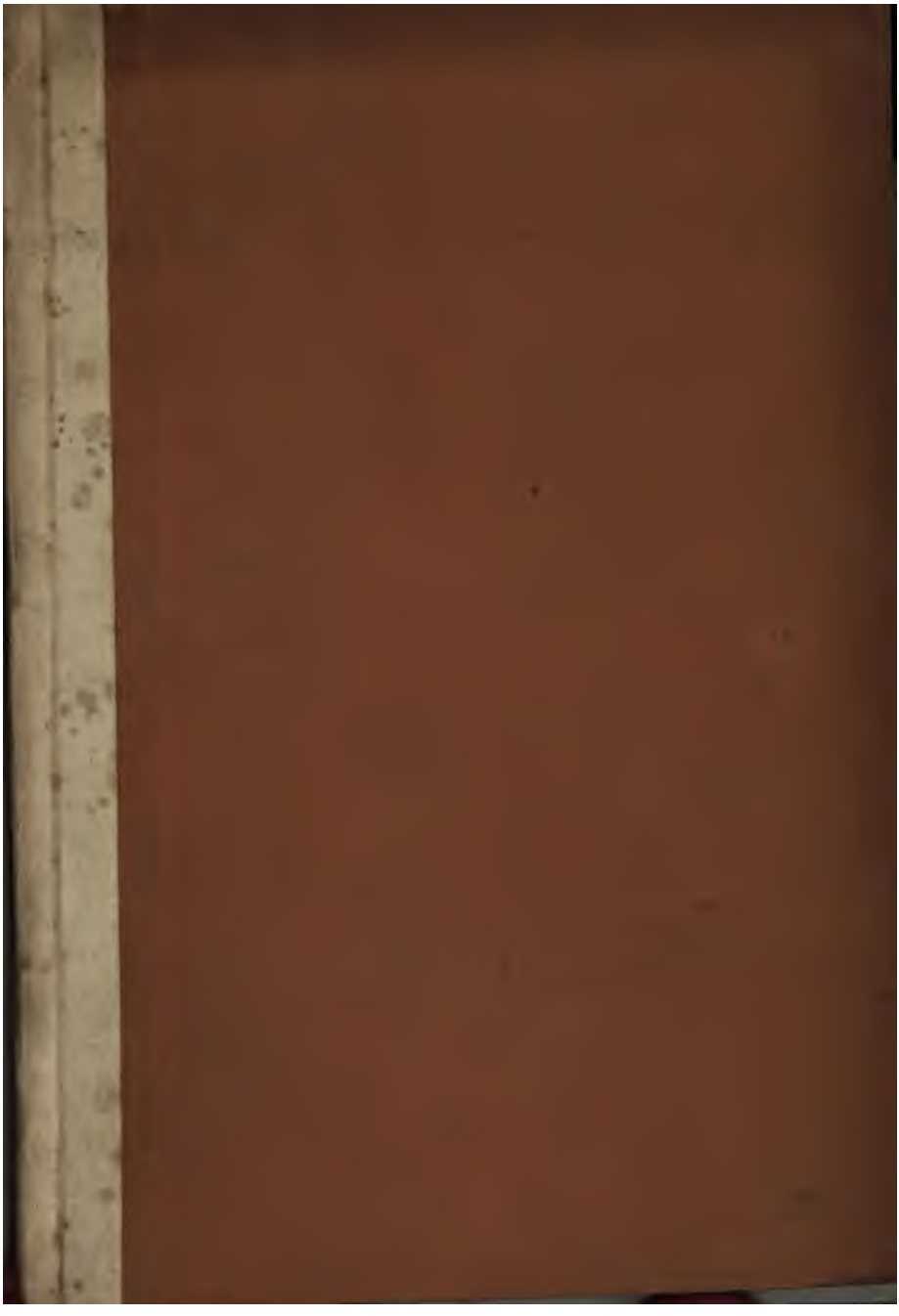

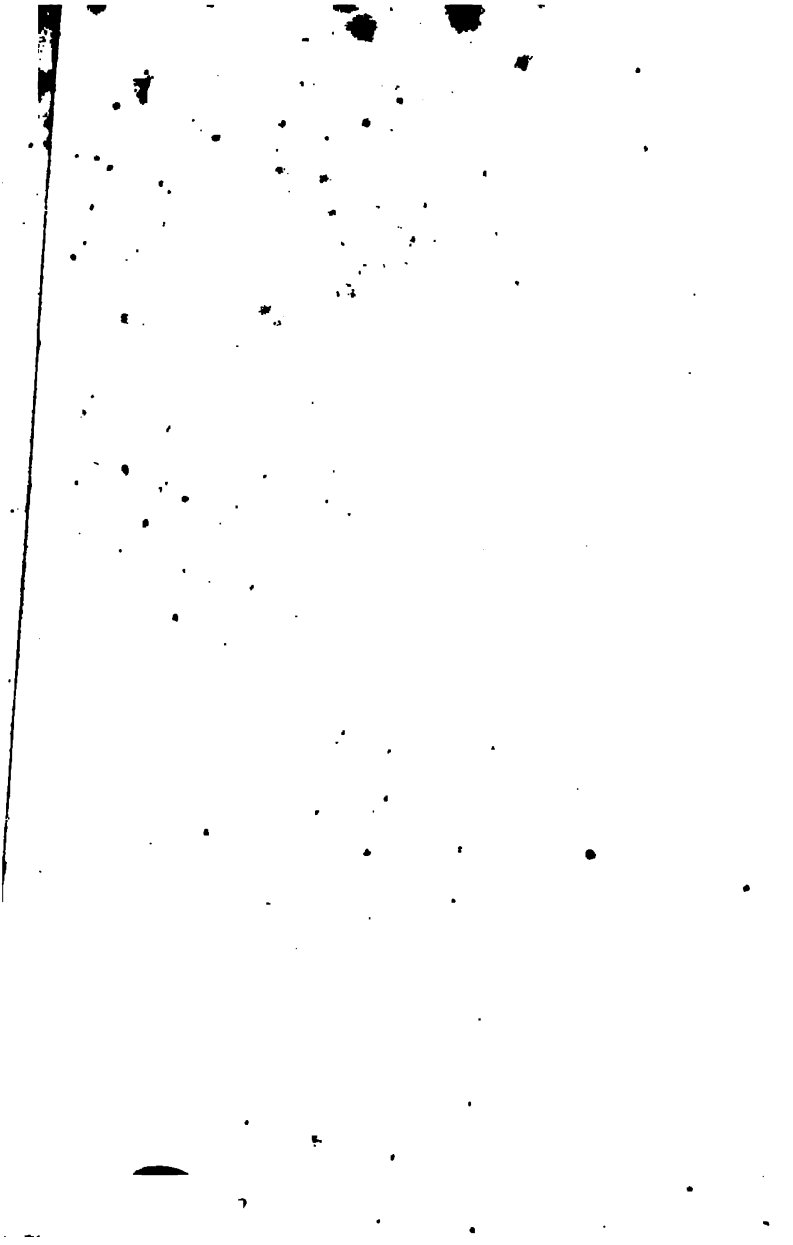

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	s.	d.
God's Views on Marriage...	0	1
Blasphemy	0	1
Liberty Equality, and Fraternity...	0	1
The Influence of Heredity on Free Will, from the German of Ludwig Büchner	0	2
The Ethics of Punishment. Third Thousand	0	1
Landlords, Tenant Farmers, and Laborers. Third Thousand...	0	1
The God Idea in the Revolution	0	1
The Gospel of Christianity and the Gospel of Freethought ...	0	1
English Marseillaise, with Music. Second Thousand ...	0	1
English Republicanism	0	1
Christian Progress. Third Thousand	0	1
The English Land System	0	1
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THE

CHRISTIAN CREED;

OR,

What it is Blasphemy to deny.

BY

ANNIE BESANT.

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THE CHRISTIAN CREED;

Or, What it is Blasphemy to deny.

A STRUGGLE has begun, which promises to be one of the fiercest that this century has seen, between the bigots and persecutors on the one hand and the supporters of free speech on the other.

It appears, then, worth while to look closely into this Christian creed, which claims the right to imprison and torture men of pure life for non-belief in its tenets. Christianity threatens us with persecution here and damnation hereafter if we do not believe its doctrines. "He that believeth not shall be damned," says Jesus. "He that believeth not shall be imprisoned and pick oakum," says Mr. Justice North. The threat of damnation would trouble us little if it stood alone—we could put off consideration of that until we arrived in the other world; but the threat of imprisonment here is unpleasant. If we are to burn for ever hereafter, the Christians might really allow us to enjoy ourselves here; is their malice (like their hell) such a bottomless pit that an eternity of torture is not enough to fill it up?

Let us see what we must believe on peril of damnation and Newgate. (1) We must believe the "Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be of divine authority;" (2) we must believe each "one of the persons in the Holy Trinity to be God," while (3) we also believe that there are not "more gods than one;" (4) we must believe the "Christian religion to be true;" we are strictly forbidden to publish any "ludicrous matter relating to God, Jesus Christ, or the Bible, or the formularies of the Church of England as by law established," and are warned that we

shall not be saved by our remarks being "intended in good faith as an argument against any doctrine or opinion."

(1) We must believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be of Divine Authority.

This first demand on our faith is a very large one, and can only be met by refusing to read any scientific book, to look at any geological or antiquarian collections, to study any kind of natural knowledge; we must erase from our memories all the facts we have learned about the world; we must reject purity and decency of morals; we must revert to a condition of barbarous ignorance and barbarous conduct before we can believe very many parts of the Holy Scriptures are of divine authority. Still, as we are to be imprisoned and damned for not believing this, we must try, and we had better examine a little more exactly what we are to believe on divine authority. Only some of our imposed feats of *leger-de-foi* will be examined. Those who can accomplish these will not bungle over the rest.

It is of divine authority that god made "a firmament in the midst of the waters" and divided the waters, putting some above it and some below, and this firmament is "heaven" (Gen. i., 6—8). This heaven has windows in it which let the rain through (Gen. vii., 11), and when these windows are closed the rain stops (Gen. viii., 2). It has doors, through which the manna was rained down on the Israelites (Ps. lxxviii., 23, 24). This "sky" is very "strong," as is indeed necessary remembering all it has to support above it, and resembles "a molten looking-glass" (Job. xxxvii., 18). Another reason why it should be very strong is that god has "set" in it the sun, moon and stars. Some of the stars are large and solid, and require a very strong setting.

My unbelieving reader, you may have some difficulty in crediting all this. You may argue that the sky is not strong at all, but is only a vast space, and that to apply the word strong to space shews gross ignorance. Divine authority says the sky *is* strong, and if you persist in believing facts instead of the Bible, you will at least find Newgate strong and its space limited. You may argue that the stars are at very various distances, and cannot all be set in one arching roof resembling a molten looking-glass; that when it rains, the rain is due to condensation of watery vapor within our

atmosphere, at a distance of at the most very few miles, and not to the opening of any windows at a distance of many billions of miles; that the firmament must be at least 5,480,490,000,000 miles away, as the stars are set in it, and the nearest fixed star is at that distance, while the furthest is beyond calculation. All these contentions of yours are facts, I admit, but they fly in the teeth of the fictions which are of divine authority; and as Mr. Justice North is armed with full power to vindicate the divine authority, you had better, if you want to keep out of gaol, give up the facts and pretend to believe in the fictions.

It is of divine authority that god made grass and herb and fruit tree on the "third day of creation," the day before he created the sun, two days before he made fishes and birds, and three days before he made animals. In the face of this it is a mere trifle, my dear sceptical reader, that no herb could yield seed, no fruit tree could yield fruit, without the aid of the sun. It is quite true that a plant without the sun-rays can form no chlorophyll; that without chlorophyll no starch, no reparation nor growth of tissues can proceed. What are these mere botanical facts beside the divine authority of the Holy Scriptures? It is also true that in the study of fossils no traces of all these grasses, herbs, and fruit trees are found precedent to all animal life. That the earliest living thing which has left a trace was an animal, not a plant. That fishes precede fruit trees in the fossilised history of the globe, although fruit trees precede fishes in the divinely authoritative fable. These geological facts must follow the botanical, my heretic, and you must be content to take the Holy Scriptures on faith, for they are not even tales founded on fact.

It is of divine authority that sun, moon, and stars were created on the fourth day, after the world had been in existence for three. It is true that to talk of a member of a solar system like our earth as existing three days before the central sun came into being is to talk nonsense. But that is of no importance if the nonsense is of divine authority. It is also true that the light travelling from part of the Milky Way at the rate of 186,000 miles per second would take 9,000 years (Mädler) to reach our earth, so that if the Holy Scriptures are of divine authority we should be unable to

hese stars, which we nevertheless do see. Who would

rashly put the testimony of everybody's eyes against the authority of this old book written in an unknown tongue, by an unknown author, at an unknown date? If the stars are there, they ought not to be, and if we can see them we ought not to be able to do so. I am not sure that they are not committing a silent and perpetual blasphemy by their very existence; but then Mr. Justice North cannot reach them to put them out, odious as is the outrage they commit on the feelings of the Christian public, and I doubt if the sentence of damnation threatened by Jesus would run in that distant spot.

It is of divine authority that on the 6th day of creation, just 5,887 years ago, god created man, male and female. It is true that man has left his bones in the ground as a record of his existence hundreds of thousands of years ago, although he has only existed during 5,887 years. But that was a thoughtless and irreverent action on his part, which cannot be allowed to have any weight as compared with the divine authority of the Holy Scriptures. Men should not leave their bones about in caves and drifts as arguments for the wicked unbeliever and puzzles for the faithful soul.

It is of divine authority that everything was once created in two different ways, perfectly incompatible the one with the other, and both equally true. The two stories of the creation are mutually exclusive; but, as they are both of divine authority, both must be believed, on peril of prison here and of damnation hereafter. It is blasphemy to deny that the world was covered with water, so that god was obliged to gather it away into one place to let the land appear, which forthwith brought forth from its moist surface herb and grass and tree (Gen. i., 12), and that the world was at the same time so dry that god could not set in it the herb and plant which he had previously made (Gen. ii., 5). It is blasphemy to deny that the vegetation was brought forth by the earth itself at the mere command of god: "Let the earth bring forth grass," etc. (Gen. i., 11). It is also blasphemy to deny that "the Lord God made . . . every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew," and that the reason for this creation before planting was that "the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground" (Gen. ii., 5).

It is blasphemy to deny that god made man, the last of his works, after the earth was clothed with vegetation, after the seas were filled with life, and after fowl were flying in the air, and beasts and cattle and creeping things were roaming over the earth (Gen i., 11, 12, 20—27). It is also blasphemy to deny that god made man, the first of his works, before any vegetation was growing on the earth, before a single fowl of the air or a single beast of the field was made (Gen ii., 5, 7, 8, 9, 19).

It is blasphemy to deny that god commanded the "waters" to "bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth" (Gen. i., 20). It is also blasphemy to deny that "out of the ground the Lord God formed . . . every fowl of the air" (Gen. ii., 19). If wicked sceptics say that the fowl cannot have been brought forth by the waters if "every fowl" was formed out of the ground, the only answer is that both these contradictory statements are of divine authority, and "he that believeth not shall be damned." Convincing, is it not?

It is blasphemy to deny that man was created with woman, in the likeness of god (Gen. i., 27, and v., 1, 2), and came into a world replete with life, with fowl and every living thing, over which god gave him dominion (Gen. i., 28). It is also blasphemy to deny that man was created without woman, and came into a world where there was no life, and that god, pitying his loneliness, formed all living things in the attempt to make a help meet for the man, and that failing in this attempt he lastly made a woman, not with man but long afterwards (the making and naming of all animals and birds intervening), out of one of the man's ribs which he detached for that purpose from his skeleton while the man was asleep (Gen. ii., 7, 18, 19—22).

It is blasphemy to deny that god gave man for food "every tree in the which is the fruit of a tree" (Gen. i., 29), while it is equally blasphemy to deny that the "Lord God" withheld from him as food one of the trees (Gen. ii., 17).

It is blasphemy to deny that god, who is "the truth," said that Adam should die "in the day that" he eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge (Gen. ii., 7), and it is blasphemy to deny that so far from dying in that day, "all

the days that Adam lived were 930 years," and that "he begat sons and daughters" (Gen. iv., 5, 4) long after the day on which, unless we blaspheme and make god a liar (1 John v., 10), we must believe that he died.

It is blasphemy to deny the fable of the Fall. It is of divine authority that a talking snake persuaded Eve to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree, and that by eating this fruit man and woman found out that they were naked, a sufficiently obvious fact of which they appear to have been ignorant. The first result of eating the forbidden fruit was a regard for decency, and they made some somewhat inadequate clothes out of fig leaves, sewing them together. There is no divine authority as to the implements used, nor as to the discovery of the needles and thread which seem necessary for the sewing. God who is "a spirit" (John iv., 24) and who is "without body" and "parts" (1 Art. of the Church established by law) "walked in the garden" (Gen. iii., 8) soon afterwards; it is blasphemy to deny that god walked, and blasphemy to assert that he has legs. The method of walking without legs is not revealed to us on divine authority, so we must believe (literally) without understanding.

It is blasphemy to deny that "the eyes of the Lord are in every place;" it is also blasphemy to assert that the eyes of the Lord were in the special place wherein Adam and his wife "hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees" (Gen. iii., 8). The only way to reconcile these contradictions is to believe that Adam and his wife and the trees behind which they hid themselves were nowhere, and to believe this comes perilously near the blasphemy of denying the whole story.

It is blasphemy to deny that god cursed the serpent—who had unfortunately lost the power of speech just at the time at which he most required it—for being the helpless tool of Satan, and condemned him to go on his belly and to eat dust. Divine authority does not say how snakes went about before this literal fall, whether on their heads or their tails, so that the method of their locomotion is not of faith.

It is blasphemy to deny that god made coats of skins for Adam and Eve, although coat-making seems rather a curious employment for a deity, and scarcely as dignified as world-making. We are not told what became of the animals

whom god deprived of their skins for this purpose; nor whether he killed them first. If he did, then death first entered into the world by god's immediate act. As it is blasphemy to deny that death entered into the world by sin (Rom. v., 12), it is difficult to avoid identifying god with sin, and this, again, is, I fear me, blasphemy.

If in any other old eastern book we read about trees the eating of the fruit of which gave knowledge, serpents which talked, gods who walked in gardens and who made coats, we should at once understand that we were reading old myths, and should never dream of regarding them as a record of historical facts. If we apply the same reasoning to the Bible, Justice North will send us to pick oakum here, and we shall be burned for ever hereafter.

It is blasphemy not to believe that "Cain went out from the presence of the Lord" (Gen. iv., 16)—whom it is blasphemy to deny is everywhere present—and that god put a mark on him lest any one—there being only in existence his own family—"finding him should kill him" (Gen. iv., 15). It is blasphemy not to believe that having a wife, who was also his sister, and who bare him a son, he "builded a city" (Gen. iv., 17) for himself, his wife and child. How many houses there were in the city, and whether each of the three inhabitants lived in a separate house, or the trio moved from house to house, so as to inhabit "the city," these things are not revealed by divine authority.

It is blasphemy not to believe that Adam lived 930 years, Cainan 910 years, Methuselah 969 years; and that the rest of the antediluvian patriarchs lived to approximate ages. It is useless to allege that such preposterous terms of life are contrary to all experience. "He that believeth not shall be damned."

It is blasphemy to deny that all the human race are descended from one man, Adam, created 5,887 years ago. It is true that there was existing in Egypt a settled government more than 11,000 years ago, and as a settled government implies centuries upon centuries of political evolution, it is hard to reconcile this fact with the declaration made on divine authority that man has only existed for about half this period. Egyptian antiquities are not safe subjects of study for the true believer, and a nation which has blasphemy laws on its statute books should shut up its

museums and burn its collections of Egyptian treasures, for each room stored with these objects is a training school for blasphemers and a standing menace to the faith of the young. Justice North should also ask that the delta of the Mississipi should be blown up with dynamite to the depth of at least a thousand feet, for that blasphemous ground has given up human bones, says the blasphemer Gliddon, which formed parts of living men 57,000 years ago.

It is of divine authority that "the strength of Israel will not lie nor repent, for he is not a man that he should repent" (1 Sam. xv., 29). It is of equally divine authority that "it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart" (Gen. vi., 6). It is blasphemy to deny that god knows all things before they take place; that before he created man he knew what man would do, and slew a lamb from the foundation of the world (Rev. xiii., 8) to atone for the sins not then committed, but which man would commit in due time; that at this same period the book of life was written containing the names of all those who were to be saved (Rev. xvii., 8); that no sin occurs that god does not himself do, (Is. xlv., 7; Amos iii., 6), so that he need not have any difficulty in avoiding sin if he objects to it. Since it is blasphemy to deny any of these propositions, it is a great trial to faith to believe that god repented when he saw happen the facts he fore-ordained, and grieved over the wickedness which he caused; yet hard as this is, you will be damned if you do not believe it, so you had better try to do so.

It is blasphemy to deny that god, "whose tender mercy is over all his works" (Prayer-book), said that he would destroy "both man and beast, and the creeping things and the fowls of the air" (Gen. vi., 7). We are not told what sins had been committed by the beasts and fowls and creeping things, so that god exclaimed: "it repenteth me that I have made them." If the Bible were a mere human book, and "the Lord" were a mere ordinary man, I should say that he was behaving like a naughty, passionate child, who has lost his temper because the paper animals he has cut out very badly will not stand properly, and who tears them up in a rage. But as it is blasphemy to say this, and blasphemy to deny that god did act exactly in the fashion that would be

naughty if he were a child, I can only suppose that the conduct for which a child would be put in the corner is admirable when displayed by a god.

Out of all the wicked men there was one man, Noah, who found "grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen. vi., 8). Noah was not what Atheists would regard as a very good man, so far as his conduct is recorded in Holy Scripture. In fact, we are not told of any one good action that he committed. He was a very selfish man, for he saved himself and his family in the ark, and left all his poor fellow-creatures to drown; he drank so much wine that he misbehaved himself shamefully before his children (Gen. ix., 21), and in any respectable society would have had a sack thrown over him, and would have been carried on a stretcher to the nearest police station; he cursed and swore at his poor grandson because his son, the young man's father, had told his brethren of the condition to which Noah had reduced himself (Gen. ix., 25). Yet, in spite of all this disgusting misbehavior, it is blasphemy to deny that "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord."

It is blasphemy to deny that in a vessel 300 cubits long, 50 cubits broad, and 30 cubits high, divided into three floors, with only one window in it, 1 cubit square, for purposes of light and ventilation, and this window kept shut till nearly the end of the time (compare Gen. viii., 6), eight persons with pairs or sevens "of every living thing of all flesh," lived for one year and seventeen days. It is blasphemy to deny that into this floating Black Hole went "of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort" (Gen. vi., 19), and although only two of every sort went in, yet of some sorts "sevens" went in, "the male and his female" (Gen. vii., 2), so that two and fourteen signify the same number when the multiplication table is of faith. What the number of this numerous live cargo of fowls, of cattle, and of every creeping thing (Gen. vi., 20) must have been, may be faintly imagined by the fact that there are known 6,200 species of the "fowls of the air" alone. As the fowls were to be taken "by sevens," there must have been an aviary in the ark containing 86,800 birds, and some of these, such as the eagles, the ostriches, and the condors would require considerable room. Of Mammalia some 1,600 species are known, and elephants, hippopotami, rhinoceroses, buffaloes,

giraffes—to take but a few instances—are fairly large, and one might imagine—were it not blasphemy to think so—that lions, tigers, pumas, leopards, wolves, etc., would not only be difficult to manage among the sevens of sheep, goats, and oxen, but would also suffer from the want of exercise necessitated by their caged condition. As the ark must have been packed quite closely in every division, from floor to ceiling, it is difficult to understand how the creatures survived their voyage, while it is blasphemy to deny that every one of them in due time "went forth out of the ark" (Gen. viii., 19).

In addition to all the living creatures, Noah took with him into the ark "of all food that is eaten" (Gen. vi., 21). As there could be no room for Noah and his family to walk about distributing the food (and it would have been scarcely safe to have left it to natural selection), we must suppose that layers of animals and layers of food were packed alternately all through, and even this arrangement must have given rise to some awkward complications if, in order to save space, a pair of caterpillars were dropped in among the cabbages packed round the noses of a pair of guinea-pigs. One might almost imagine that the going forth from the ark must have been a lively ante-type of the general resurrection of the dead.

But yet again, in my efforts to realise this beautiful and divinely inspired history, I am almost afraid that I am being beguiled into blasphemy. "Lord, I (do not) believe. Help thou mine unbelief."

It is blasphemy to deny that 4,232 years ago a universal flood took place, covering "all the high hills that were under the whole heaven" (Gen. vii., 19); the manner in which this was done is partly explained by Peter, who tells us that at that time the earth was "standing out of the water and in the water: whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished" (2 Pet. iii., 5, 6). This world—half in, half out of the water—is not any world known to history nor to science; there is not a shadow of proof of its existence, except that of divine authority; such a world has nothing in common with our own globe, a planet circling round the sun; the solar system, as we know it, would have been disorganised by the sudden increase in mass of one of its members; our globe has most certainly

not been "overflowed with water" during the last 5,000 years, for the cones built up of scoriæ from Mount Etna have been undisturbed for at least 12,000 years. If you believe the testimony of these hills, you must believe that divine authority has blundered over the deluge; but then, if you think this you will be damned, and if you say it Justice North will send you to pick oakum.

It is of divine authority that the ark came to land upon the mountains of Ararat (Gen. viii., 4) after its long and stormy voyage. The humming-birds, the tropical butterflies, the monkeys and the animals of the equatorial zone must have found it rather chilly during their seven-months' stay in the region of perpetual snow, especially as there can have been no facilities for hot-water pipes in the ark. All the living things, tropical or polar, must have also suffered much from the difficulty of breathing on that exalted spot, as the waters went down and the higher atmosphere regained its normal rarity. But what are little difficulties of this sort to the true believer, especially when into the scale of belief are thrown the smile of god and the approval of Mr. Justice North?

It is of divine authority that Noah sent out of the ark a dove, which returned to him finding "no rest for the sole of her foot," "for the waters were on the face of the whole earth" (Gen. viii., 9); yet seven days later the same dove returned from a second excursion with "an olive leaf pluckt off," "in her mouth" (v., 11). It is, therefore, blasphemy to deny that an olive tree stood firm beneath the crushing weight of the tons of water which covered every high hill, and was so little injured by its submersion of eleven months that it promptly budded out as the water left uncovered its topmost boughs.

It is of divine authority that "every beast, every creeping thing, and every fowl, and whatsoever creepeth upon the earth after their kinds, went forth out of the ark" (Gen. viii., 19), and that Noah, lest his god should not have had his appetite for slaughter satiated by the putrifying masses of the drowned dead, scattered over the face of the whole earth, took "of every clean beast and of every clean fowl" (v. 20), and offered up his puny sacrifice by fire from the few living things left from the huge sacrifice by water. It is blasphemy to deny that as the fumes of the roasting ani-

mals went up "the Lord smelled a sweet savor" (v. 21), and gratefully declared: "neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done" (v. 21). So that god appears to have made man, then to have repented that he made him, then to have destroyed him, and then to have been half sorry once more, declaring that he would not do it again. And this is the god in "whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James i., 17). It certainly required a revelation to tell us so.

It is of divine authority that the "fear" and "dread" of man is on every "beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea" (Gen. ix., 2). This fear is not very evident in the tiger as he tears a man in pieces, in the vulture who picks out the eyes of the dying traveller, in the shark who snaps in twain the swimming sailor; yet it is consoling to know that they are all trembling with dread of their prey as they swallow the toothsome morsel. The "covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh" (Gen. ix., 15) is rather funny; if it were not blasphemy to deny it I should scarcely have conceived of god entering into a covenant with, say, a black-beetle. The covenant is not of much use to individuals apparently, though entered into with "every" one of them, for though god promises that he will not again drown them all *en masse*, he gives no pledge as to drowning in detail, and this is quite as unpleasant to the victims.

It is blasphemy to deny that 4,130 years ago "the whole earth was of one language and of one speech" (Gen. xi., 1), and the whole science of philology is therefore a delusion and a snare. As "they"—the whole earth—"journeyed from the east," they "found a plain," and made up their minds to build "a city and a tower whose top may reach unto heaven" (verses 2 and 4). It is blasphemy to deny that god—who at that time appears to have known little about the laws of gravitation or the difficulty of breathing, say, five miles up—thought they might succeed, and, being omnipresent, he changed his place, and "came down to see the city and the tower which the children of men builded." In order to prevent the appearance of the top of the tower in heaven—heaven being above the firmament, the firmament having the stars set in it, and the

nearest fixed star being 5,480,490,000,000 miles away, so that if they had directed their tower towards this star, and had built at the rate of ten miles a day, it would have taken them more than 1,501,504,109 years to reach heaven, that is, they would have had to build for 1,501,599,979 years onwards from the present time—god being afraid that they would storm his realm, took the trouble to confound their language, so that they might not understand each other's speech. When we read of the Titans trying to storm heaven, we know that the story is a myth; but the same fable is "Bible truth" in Genesis, and it is blasphemy to deny it, foolish as it is.

It is blasphemy to deny that when Terah was 70 years of age he begat Abram (Gen. xi., 26), and that he died when he was 205 years of age (verse 32); it is blasphemy to deny that Abram was 75 years old when he departed out of Haran and went into Canaan (Gen. xii., 4, 5); it is blasphemy to deny that Abram stayed in Haran until after his father's death (Acts vii., 4); that is, it is blasphemy to deny that the 135 years of Terah's life are of exactly the same length as the 75 years of Abram's life. Anyone who believes not that 135=75 will be damned. Moral, parents should not allow their children to learn arithmetic, for by so doing they imperil their immortal souls, and risk their committal to gaol by the tender mercies of Mr. Justice North.

Sarai, about whose age there is some doubt, in consequence of the great length of her husband's years, was a very fair woman; reckoning by Terah's age, she must have been at this time at least 160 years old (supposing that she married at 15), but she seems to have been only 90 years of age at least 25 years later (Gen. xvii., 17). However, whether she was a fair woman of 160 summers, or a gay young thing of only 65, she proved to be indeed a treasure to her husband. For it is of divine authority that faithful Abraham pretended that his wife was only his sister, and allowed King Pharaoh to take her and to pay him for her "sheep, and oxen, and he-asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she-asses, and camels" (Gen. xii., 16); it is blasphemy to deny that god plagued poor innocent "Pharaoh and his house with great plagues" because they were deceived by his friend's shameless venality and lying, and that when

Pharaoh discovered the fraud, Abram took himself off with his wife and all he had gained by her sale, being, as the sacred narrative naively remarks, "very rich" (Gen. xiii., 2) after this transaction.

It is blasphemy to deny that "he [god] is faithful that promised" (Heb. x., 23); it is also blasphemy to deny that he [god] broke his promises. For he promised Abram, over and over again, that he would give to him as well as to his seed the land of Canaan (Gen. xiii., 15; xv., 7, 8; xvii., 8, etc.); yet we find that Abram was obliged to buy a sepulchre for his wife's corpse, and never inherited the land at all. Even as far as his seed was concerned, god broke the "everlasting covenant" (Gen. xvii., 9) he made, to give to "thee and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, even the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession" (Gen. v., 8), for the Jews only possessed part of this land for a short time, instead of for ever, and as defined by god, "this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (Gen. xv., 18), they never had it at all. It is comforting to notice that this promise-breaking god is the same who in the person of his son declared: "he that believeth not shall be damned;" for as he did not keep his word in the one case perhaps he will not do so in the other.

One day, as Abram was returning from the slaughter of some of his enemies, a certain Melchizedek, named with charming appropriateness King of Peace (Heb. vii., 2), went out to meet him, and blessed him. Nothing is said in Genesis to make us regard Melchizedek as the extraordinary being that he really was; for it is blasphemy to say that Melchizedek was ever born, that he had any ancestors, that he ever died (Heb. vii., 3); like Topsy, "'spects he growed"; where he is now nobody knows; he would be a most useful "Christian antiquity," but he is not producible. On the world's stage he made but this one appearance, "positively for the first and last time." Melchizedek is a type of Jesus Christ. Jesus was born; Melchizedek was not. Jesus had a mother; Melchizedek had none. Jesus had his descent from David; Melchizedek was without descent. Jesus died; Melchizedek had no end of life. The correspondence between them is really striking. The only similarity is that they were both without any acknowledged father, and this

peculiarity they share with many pagan heroes and with some less important folk.

It is blasphemy to deny that Abram, the "friend of God," took to himself his wife's maid, Hagar, and that when this poor slave was about to bear him a child he chivalrously handed her over to her jealous mistress, Sarai, saying: "Behold, thy maid is in her hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee" (Gen xvi., 6). An ordinary man, under such circumstances, would have had some tender, pitiful feeling towards the mother of his unborn child; but Abram was a saint of God, and was above all weak sentiment of that kind, so he stood quietly by while Sarai ill-treated the woman who had lain in his arms, and let her flee away into the wilderness unhelped and unpitied. God's angel drove poor Hagar back to her bondage, and after her return her son was born. At this time Abram was 86 years of age; fourteen years later Sarah had a son, Isaac, and some time after she insisted on turning out poor Ishmael, with his mother, Hagar. A sweet, womanly creature was Sarah. Abraham made no objection, but "rose up early in the morning" to send off his first-born son and his mother, and was generous enough to take "bread and a bottle of water," and to make this splendid present to Hagar "putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away." "The child" was now about fifteen years of age, and would have been a little heavy for poor Hagar to carry if he had been an ordinary well-grown boy; he was, however, curiously small for his age, for we learn that when "the water was spent in the bottle" "she cast the child under one of the shrubs" (Gen. xxi., 15). It is blasphemy to deny that Hagar carried this big baby, and threw him about like a toy.

It is blasphemy to deny that "the Lord" appeared to Abraham in the plains of Mamre, and that he, with two others, eat dressed calf, butter and milk (Gen. xviii., 1—8). It is blasphemy to say that god has parts (Art. I.), but it is difficult to understand how he eat without teeth, and swallowed without a throat; besides, what became of the eaten meat if there was no stomach to receive it? Truly, the gate is narrow which leadeth unto life, and narrow must be the brains that go in therethrough.

It is blasphemy to deny that god, who knows everything, did not know what was going on in Sodom and Gomorrah.

He said: "Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know" (Gen. xviii., 20, 21). Much faith is necessary to believe that god knew and that he did not know all at once, but "he that believeth not shall be damned."

It is blasphemy to deny that the same god who did not punish Lot and his daughters for incest, punished Lot's poor wife because she committed the terrible crime of looking back towards her burning home. She was turned into a "pillar of salt" (Gen. xix., 26), and Jesus bids us remember her (Luke xvii., 32), but does not say why we should do so. If god had forgotten her and had turned the two daughters into salt, the family history would have been less scandalous than it is.

It is blasphemy to deny that god "rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven" (Gen. xix., 24). Heaven must be a pleasant place if it contains stores of brimstone and fire which can be rained down in this fashion. Action of this kind is supposed to be wicked when done by man, but a divine O'Donovan Rossa is apparently held up for our admiration. I have sometimes wondered whether this brimstone may not possibly have come from the lake of brimstone and fire connected with the bottomless pit (Rev. xx., 10); if so, it is very probable that as the earth turned round and Sodom and Gomorrah came opposite the bottomless pit, so that it was above those "towns," god lifted the lid and let out some of the contents. This view should commend itself to the religious, as it cannot be pleasant for them to look forward to spending eternity in the close neighborhood of a celestial manufactory of dynamite.

It is blasphemy to deny that "just Lot" (2 Pet. ii., 7) offered his two virgin daughters to satiate the lust of the crowd surrounding his house: "let me, I pray you," said this good father, "bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes." This generous offer, which would be vile in any one but a saint, throws much light on his later relations with these young women. The frightful crime related in Gen. xix., 30—36, seems to have been much approved of by god; for we learn in Deut. ii., 9 and

19, that the Moabites and Ammonites were not to be molested, for their lands were given "unto the children of Lot for a possession," and the reference Bible refers us back on this to the beautiful story in Genesis. Little English girls are given this story to read, and it would be blasphemous to teach them that Lot and his daughters were criminals of the filthiest type. The holy book of god says that Lot was a "just" man, and there is not a word of disapproval of his vice. If it were not that all good little girls must read the Bible, it would be far better that they should not know that such crimes are committed at all. Children's thoughts should never be turned towards sexual matters in any fashion, and they do not so turn of themselves, and it would be one of the worst mischiefs done by the Bible—if it were not the book of god—that it destroys this natural healthy indifference in children's minds. It is not wonderful that such frightful tales of family immorality are but too often told at the assizes, or that poor ignorant people, believing with blind faith in the Bible, repeat the crime of Lot and his daughters, and are startled when our human laws punish peremptorily the crime which in the Bible is blessed of god.

It is blasphemy to deny that god plagued the innocent household of Abimelech, the king of Gerar, because Abimelech had been deceived by the lie of Abraham, god's friend. From the story as related in Genesis xx. we learn that Abimelech took Sarah—then over ninety years of age—believing her to be Abraham's sister; next, that finding out the trick played on him, he gave her back to her base husband, rebuking him in "that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin;" next, that Sarah was Abraham's half-sister, although she was also his wife, and that such marriage unions between children of the same father by different mothers are pleasing to god; next, that Abraham accepted "sheep and oxen and men-servants and women-servants" from Abimelech with his restored wife, as well as "a thousand pieces of silver," ironically bestowed on him as her "brother;" and, finally, we learn that it is blasphemy to deny that just the same sequence of events happened twice over to Abraham, and also happened to Isaac his son (Gen. xxvi., 7—11), who inherited the family untruthfulness and the family cowardice with the family property.

It is blasphemy for a man to say "when he is tempted,

I am tempted of god; for god cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man" (James i., 13). Yet it is blasphemy to deny that "after these things god did tempt Abraham (Gen. xxii., 1). If anybody is infidel enough to ask how a god that tempts no one could have tempted Abraham, the best answer is: "He that believeth not shall be damned." Perhaps Abraham was no one, and in that case both statements would be true.

Everyone knows the beautiful story of Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac. How this noble father led his child to the slaughter; how Isaac meekly submitted; how the farce went on till the lad was bound and laid on the altar, and how god then stopped the murder, and blessed the intending murderer for his willingness to commit the crime. If anyone now tries to emulate Abraham's faith, he is treated as a dangerous lunatic; but it is blasphemy to deny that that which would be murder now was virtue then.

It is blasphemy to deny that Isaac was born when his father and mother were too old for his birth to be natural (Gen. xvii., 17); in fact, Abraham was "as good as dead" and Sarah "was past age" (Heb. xi., 11, 12), and we are told that when "he was about an hundred years old" "his own body" was "now dead" (Rom. iv., 19). Although it is blasphemy to assert that he was *not* too old at 100 to become the father of one son, it is also blasphemy to assert that he *was* too old more than 37 years later to become the father of six sons (Gen. xxv., 2). We are bound to believe that Abraham was naturally capable of becoming a father when he was 86 years of age, and when he was over 137 years of age, but that it was only by a miracle that he was capable of becoming a father when he was 100 years of age. Truly there are in the Bible "some things hard to be understood" (2 Pet. iii., 16).

It is blasphemy to deny that before Esau and Jacob were born god chose one as his favorite, and declared: "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (Rom. ix., 13). If anyone should carpingly allege that it was wrong to hate poor unborn Esau before he had committed "any good or evil" (Rom. ix., 11), the right answer is that "god's ways are not as our ways," and that which would be wickedness in man is righteousness in god. God loved *Jacob*. *Jacob* would not give his starving brother food

until he had bargained for his birthright in return (Gen. xxv., 29—34); but god loved Jacob. Jacob cheated his blind father, pretending to be his brother, and deceived the old man's sense of touch, the sense of vision having failed (Gen. xxvii., 11, 12, 15, 16, 22, 23); but god loved Jacob. Jacob was a hypocrite, and when he took a kid dressed to imitate vension to his father, pretended that he had found it quickly "because the Lord thy god brought it to me" (v. 20); but god loved Jacob. Jacob was a liar, declaring that he was his brother Esau (v. 19, 24); but god loved Jacob. Jacob was a coward, and ran away from his defrauded brother; but god loved Jacob. Jacob hated his wife (Gen. xxix., 31); yet god loved Jacob. Jacob swindled his hospitable uncle Laban out of his flocks and herds (Gen. xxx., 31-43); yet god loved Jacob. Jacob ran away from his uncle with his ill-gotten gains, like a thief in the night (Gen. xxxi, 20); yet god loved Jacob. Jacob was once more a coward, afraid of the brother he had wronged, and sent on some of his people to get killed that he might escape (Gen. xxxii., 7, 8); yet god loved Jacob. It is instructive to know the kind of men that god loves, and to know that god loves a bargaining, cheating, hypocritical, lying, swindling coward. As to poor Esau, on whom fell the awful hate of god before he was born, he seems to have been a brave, loving, generous-hearted man. The kindly words of the man god hated, as he refused his cringing brother's present: "I have enough, my brother; keep that thou hast unto thyself" (Gen. xxxiii., 9), contrast forcibly with the mean, despicable conduct of the man god loved. It is blasphemy to deny that god abetted pious Jacob's frauds, for we learn that "god hath taken away the cattle of your father, and given them to me" (Gen. xxxi., 9), and that in suggesting the method of fraud god reminded him of the share due to himself by the vow he had made (Gen. xxxi., 13), the said vow being that "of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth to thee" (Gen. xxviii., 22).

It is blasphemy to deny that the foul stories of Tamar and Onan, of Tamar and Judah, and of the births of Pharez and Zarah—the children of Judah and his daughter-in-law—with all the details of the several events (Gen. xxxviii.),

are of divine authority. If any one but god had told the stories they would be indecent, and the teller would be liable to prosecution under Lord Campbell's act. Out of the filthiest literature the story told in verses 27—30 could not be paralleled, and I doubt if Holywell Street has anything fouler on its book-shelves. Yet little innocent girls are given the book containing these perfectly useless and indescribable nastinesses; and if decent people venture to criticise the book, avoiding the parts of it only fit for pious hands, they are liable to be sent to gaol, and the judge accuses them of undermining morality! The sooner the morality built on Judah, Tamar, and the stories of Onan and Pharez, is undermined the better for decent society.

The story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife is told in the next chapter (Gen. xxxix.), and I have heard a clergyman read this story out in church without the smallest hesitation to listening men, women, and children. Christianity blunts the very commonest feelings of human decency in the minds of its followers; and the clergy, who deprave the minds of the young by circulating the Holy Book, have the insolence to accuse unbelievers in its divinity of undermining morality!

It is blasphemy to deny that god blessed the Egyptian midwives for telling a deliberate lie (Ex. i., 19, 20). It is also blasphemy to deny that "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord" (Prov. xii., 22). The only deduction we can draw from these two facts, both given on divine authority, is that god blesses that which is an abomination to him. Once again we must say piously: "His ways are not as our ways."

With the second chapter of Exodus begins the story of Moses, "the man of god." Like most of the Bible saints, Moses was a great sinner from the point of view of ordinary morality. He began his public career with a murder. "And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren and looked on their burdens; and he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren. And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian and hid him in the sand" (Ex. ii., 11, 12). The careful looking "this way and that way" before he interferes shows the care for his own person that charac-

terises Moses. A man might have been moved by honest indignation to smite an oppressor. The careful looking round and the hiding of the body do not impress us with a sense of the heroic.

After this adventure Moses ran away from Egypt and dwelt in Midian, and while looking after his father-in-law's flock, he saw a remarkable sight, a bush burning, but not consumed. It is blasphemy to deny that god was in the "midst of the bush" (Ex. iii., 4), and it is blasphemy to suggest, what is nevertheless true, that this legend of a god in the midst of a bush is a trace of the old tree-worship so common in Eastern lands, a worship constantly referred to later in the Hebrew scriptures under the name of "the grove." This god who spoke to Moses was one of the gods of the grove. It is very unfortunate that the truth should be so blasphemous.

It is blasphemy to deny that god said: "Thou shalt not steal" (Ex. xx., 15), and also blasphemy to deny that he commanded the Israelites to rob the Egyptians (Ex. iii., 21, 22). Little discrepancies of this sort must not be allowed to trouble the true believer. Moses did not believe what god said, and in later times he that believeth not shall be damned. But in those days god treated sceptics more mercifully, and instead of damning Moses god performed two miracles to convince him. What a pity that Mr. Foote did not live in the days of Moses; if his walking-stick had turned into a snake, and then when he had caught hold of the snake's tail it had turned back into a walking-stick, perhaps he might have become a believer. It puzzles me a little, however, why the performance of useless and childish miracles of this sort should be admitted as proving anything. If I go to Maskelyne and Cooke's I see much more wonderful transformations than those performed on Mount Horeb, but I do not, therefore, feel inclined to worship Mr. Maskelyne or to take Mr. Cooke as my guide and mentor. Miracles are hopelessly irrelevant; if they were all true they would prove nothing beyond the dexterity of the miracle-worker.

It is blasphemy to deny that the rod changed into a serpent; yet who can believe this who tries to realise what the words mean? a piece of wood, of vegetable tissue, is suddenly transformed into a snake, into bones and muscle,

and nerve and blood, and skin! We are here in the region of fairy-tale, not of history. We may also note that when this wonderful transformation-scene was repeated before Pharoah, the Egyptian jugglers proved themselves to be quite as skilful at snake-making as were Moses and Aaron. The scene ended, however, with a grand effect: for "Aaron's rod swallowed all their rods" (Ex. vii., 12). The sacred narrative does not state the result on the triumphant stick, nor whether it showed the thickness of all the rods combined, when it turned back again into a stick.

Moses appears to have shared my doubts as to the point of the miracles, for he persisted that he did not want to go, until god, who is without passions (Art. I.) got very angry (Ex. ix., 14). At last, he agreed to go, and god informed him as to Pharoah: "I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go" (Ex. ix., 21). This unhappy Pharaoh was "raised up" by god in order that god's power might be manifested in tormenting him and his miserable people; over and over again, god "hardened his heart," and Paul, instead of being ashamed of this awful conduct actually justifies it (see p. 25). If any human being forced a helpless creature into crime, and then punished him for committing it, no words of abhorrence could be found too strong to express the loathing which would fill every just and righteous heart in contemplating such conduct. Yet it is blasphemy to deny that the "heavenly Father" behaved in this fashion towards Pharaoh.

The odd little interlude which takes up vv. 24, 25, 26 of the same chapter has been a sore trouble to commentators. Why "the Lord" tried to kill somebody, who it was he tried to kill, where "the inn" was by which he met him, what the mutilation of her son by Zipporah had to do with the quarrel, all these things have been discussed and re-discussed *ad nauseam*. Students of ancient religions will find that nature-worship throws some light on the matter, but it is blasphemous light, and must be carefully avoided by all true believers who are anxious about the salvation of their souls.

It is blasphemy to say that god was known to Abraham "by my name Jehovah" (Ex. vi., 8); it is also blasphemy to deny that Abraham knew him as Jehovah

and "called the name of the place Jehovah-jireh" (Gen. xxii., 14).

It is blasphemy to deny that Moses turned all the water in Egypt, the water in streams, rivers, ponds, pools, as well as all in vessels; after *all* the water had been thus turned into blood, the Egyptian magicians turned the rest into blood (Ex. vii., 19, 20, 22). This is a very remarkable miracle, showing great skill on the part of the Egyptians.

It is blasphemy to deny the historical truth and perfect accuracy of the Biblical account of the miracles wrought by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt. It is very hard work to believe, but we must try, for it is clear that if we go to gaol for denying them, we shall not get out "till we have paid the uttermost farthing" demanded by law.

First, we must believe that "the Lord" kept on sending messages to Pharaoh, commanding him to let the people go, while at the same time "the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go" (Ex. x., 20). It is blasphemy to deny that god behaved in this horribly wicked manner, compelling Pharaoh to refuse, and then plaguing him and his people for the refusal; we deserve damnation if we do not agree with Paul, when he writes: "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy. For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou will say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault, for who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it: Why hast thou made me thus?" (Rom. ix., 16—20.) Yes, most certainly it should so say, if it be a living sentient thing, capable of enjoyment and of agony. No god has the right to create sentient beings, to harden them, and then to find fault with them and torture them for being hardened. The challenge, "Why doth he yet find fault?" is a very proper one, and Paul cannot answer it, so he falls back on god's power to do as he chooses; but the exercise of the power would be a crime, and if it be blasphemy to

say that such unutterable wickedness is criminal, then I will blaspheme as long as I live, rather than turn flattering courtier to a monarch more cruel than Caligula, a despot more tyrannical than any Eastern potentate known to history.

After the duel about the water between Moses and the Egyptian magicians — in which the magicians certainly shewed the greater power and dexterity—Moses and Aaron covered the land of Egypt with frogs (Ex. viii., 6), and again the magicians proved quite as capable. Exit frogs. Enter lice. This was too much for the magicians; "all the dust of the land became lice" (viii., 17)—note this proof of spontaneous generation—so the material was lacking to the magicians, but as they had done so well in turning the water into blood after it had all become blood already, it is disappointing to find that they broke down at this critical period. Perhaps they were tired.

Exit lice. Enter flies. That was a very horrid plague. Blue-bottles everywhere. They filled the cream-jugs, they covered the joints, they fell into the jam, they stuck in the treacle. Fly-papers went up 100 per cent, and several gentlemen in the profession made fortunes during the rush. "A greater than" these, however, came to the rescue: "the Lord" himself "removed the swarms of flies," and joyful to relate, "there remained not one" (viii., 31). I should like to have spent the remainder of that summer in Egypt. As day after day went on, and not a solitary buzz was heard, how joyfully must the maids and matrons of Egypt have chanted in thankful chorus: "Fly not yet!"

Pharaoh's heart remaining petrified, an attack was made on the flocks and herds. "A very grievous murrain" was sent "upon thy cattle which is in the field, upon the horses, upon the asses, upon the camels, upon the oxen, and upon the sheep" (Ex. ix., 3). And they *all* died. Between the dead frogs and the dead cattle Egypt must have been . . . . well, let us say fragrant. While they were all lying there dead, god sent boils on them; the object of this is not clear, and it is a little difficult to understand how the boils flourished on cold corpses; still the Scriptures cannot lie, and thus it is written. With that appropriateness which shews real genius, Moses, at the Lord's command, sprinkled "handfuls of ashes of the furnace," and in "these ashes glowed their former fires," and they caused "a boil."

The next miracle is a very remarkable one. Forgetting that all the beasts were dead and boiled, the Lord said: "Send therefore now and gather thy cattle and all that thou hast in the field; for upon every man and beast which shall be found in the field and shall not be brought home, the hail shall come down upon them and they shall die" (ix., 19). Some made their dead "cattle flee into the houses," thus showing a skill and a miracle-working power which must have made Moses very jealous; others left theirs in the field, probably thinking that the boil-covered carcases were not worth the trouble of carriage. Down came the hail, and smote "all that was in the field, both man and beast" (ix., 25). Here indeed was an exemplification, so far as the cattle were concerned, of the second death.

Next came the locusts, to "eat the residue of that which is escaped, which remaineth unto you from the hail" (x., 5). As the hail "smote *every* herb of the field and brake *every* tree of the field" (ix., 25), there cannot have been much left for the locusts; however, they made a clean sweep of all the vegetable life in Egypt, "and there remained not any green thing in the trees or in the herbs of the fields" (x., 15). On the whole it was by a merciful dispensation of Providence that the cattle were all dead, and were not left to starve. As all the animals were dead and there were no plants left, the Lord had nearly come to the end of his plagues; so he sent "darkness which may be felt" for three days, while trying to invent some more. None of the Egyptians, we are told, rose "from his place for three days;" why nobody struck a light we are not told; now-a-days we often have plagues of darkness in London from the fogs, but we make shift with gas and the electric light until the sunlight returns.

The last miracle in Egypt was a very wonderful one; it was the killing for the third time of some—the first-born—cattle. The first-born of men were also slain; but that was only for the first time, and all men are mortal. This was too much for the Egyptians, and they rose up to drive out the Israelites, the latter picking up, as they went, "jewels of silver, jewels of gold, and raiment" (xii. 35), and so robbing their unlucky hosts of the little property they had left.

But poor Pharaoh was not yet safe: "The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued after the children of Israel" (xiv. 8). He yoked into his chariots the twice-slain horses, and mounted his men on others of these re-revivified quadrupeds, and galloped after the flying robbers. God, to deliver his people, divided the sea before them, piling up the waters on each side as a wall. Down along this curious and unique path plunged the men and the horses, the latter probably thinking that one death, more or less, couldn't hurt them. A new difficulty arose. God pulled off their chariot-wheels, and so delayed them; and then suddenly down came the water-walls, and the poor Egyptians were all drowned. Like the flies and the locusts, "there remained not so much as one of them" (xiv. 28). The horses also were drowned, and let us hope they did not come to life again.

Thus endeth the story of the miracles of Egypt, which story is part of the Christian creed as defined by law, and which it is blasphemy to deny.

After the Lord had thrown "the horse and his rider" into the sea, the children of Israel went on into the wilderness, and found no water for three days. At the end of that time they found some "bitter" water, but the Lord showed Moses a tree which made the water sweet. Genus and species not revealed to us. It is very odd that, when the Bible mentions anything that might be practically useful, it never gives such particulars as would enable us to repeat the experiment.

The next trial to our faith is the story of the manna. The people might well ask: "What is this?" It was so expansible and contractile that, when they measured it, having "gathered some more, some less," if a man gathered much he had "nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack" (Ex. xvi., 17, 18). This curious result of measuring it "with an omer" is, however, susceptible of explanation, for we read, in Ex. xvi., 36, that "an omer is the tenth part of an ephah," whereas, in Ezech. xlv., the ephah contains "the tenth part of an homer." Perhaps in measuring some of the Jews dropped their h's. The variable expansion of the manna is not its only peculiarity. Manna gathered on Thursday "bred worms and stank" if kept till Friday; manna gathered on Friday "did not stink,

neither was there any worm therein" on Saturday (xvi., 20 and 24).

The bread difficulty disposed of, the water difficulty again came to the front, but Moses smote a rock, and water came out of it (Ex. xvii., 6). Later, under very similar circumstances, Moses smote another rock with the like result (Numb. xx., 11.), and the Lord was very angry with him, and refused to let him enter "the promised land." It is curious that in both these cases the place was called Meribah, because of the complaints of the Israelites; but it would be blasphemy to say that two traditions of one incident have been inserted in the text.

Soon after this a wonderful battle took place, in which Israel fought against Amalek, and "it came to pass when Moses held up his hand that Israel prevailed, and when he let down his hand Amalek prevailed" (Ex. xvii., 11). The relation of cause and effect is not clear, but it is satisfactory to know that Moses' hands were held up by main force until evening stopped the slaughter.

It is blasphemy to say that there are more gods than one (Statute of Will. III.), yet it is blasphemy to deny that "the Lord is greater than all gods" (Ex. xviii., 11). It is hard to understand how the Lord can be greater than gods which do not exist; nevertheless "he that believeth not shall be damned."

Chapters xix. and xx. of Exodus can only be believed by those who have not risen above the most anthropomorphic conception of their god. God is everywhere, yet Moses went backwards and forwards between the people and god (xix., 3—9). God is everywhere, yet Moses "brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God" (v., 17), and "the Lord descended upon" a particular mountain (v. 18), and "came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mount" (v. 20). God is invisible, one "whom no man hath seen nor can see" (1 Tim. vi., 16), whom "no man hath seen at any time" (John i., 18); yet he was afraid lest the people should "break through unto the Lord to gaze" (Ex. xix., 21), and up the mount went "Moses, and Aaron, and Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and they saw the God of Israel" (Ex. xxiv., 9, 10). God dwells "in the light which no man can approach unto" (1 Tim. vi., 16), and "God is light and in him is no dark-

ness at all" (1 John i., 5); yet "Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was" (Ex. xx., 21). It is blasphemy to deny that all these contradictions are true.

It is blasphemy to deny that god, on Mount Sinai, gave commands among which we find the following revolting and immoral ones: If the owner of a Hebrew slave give the slave a wife, and the slave goes out at the end of seven years, "the wife and her children shall be her master's; he shall go out by himself" (Ex. xxi., 4). The wife is like any other female animal; she and her young belong to her master, and she may be used to increase his stock. If the husband and father clings to his family, god mercifully allows him to buy the right to live with them with the price of his freedom. A man may sell his daughter to be a concubine, and if her purchaser starve her, or let her go naked, or does not perform his marital duty, she may leave him (vv. 7—11). A man may beat his man or woman slave to death, provided that he or she lives "a day or two" after the flogging, for "he is his money" (vv. 20, 21), and the loss of his valuable chattel is punishment sufficient. If an ox gore a man, the ox is to be stoned (v. 28), a form of vivisection which Lord Coleridge can scarcely approve; but, as Paul says: "Doth god take care for oxen?" (1 Cor. ix., 9). If the ox gore a slave, the owner of the slave is to be paid for the value of his property (v. 32). If a thief be unable to restore the double or fourfold value, as the case may be, of that which he has stolen, "then he shall be sold for his theft" (xxii., 3). A witch is to be murdered (v. 20). An idolater is to be murdered (v. 20). "The first-born of thy sons shalt thou give unto me. Likewise shalt thou do with thine oxen and with thy sheep" (vv. 29, 30). Is it credible that by the law of England it should be blasphemy to deny that these horrible commands are "of divine authority"?

And as though to show that this book is of purely human origin, with the mingled good and evil inseparable from all early efforts at legislation, we read, after the foregoing horrors the following noble and generous teaching:

"Thou shalt not raise a false report: put not thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou *speak in a cause to* decline after many to wrest judgment. *Neither shalt thou* countenance a poor man in his cause.

If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him. Thou shalt not wrest the judgment of thy poor in in his cause. Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked. And thou shalt take no gift: for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the righteous. Also thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." (xxiii., 1—9.)

Here we see the pen of some lofty and tender lawgiver, who has nothing in common with the savage chief who "breathed out threatenings and slaughter."

It is blasphemy to deny that the Lord on Mount Sinai gave a number of frivolous commands, about a candlestick (Ex. xxv., 31—39) with its snuff-dishes, and curtains, and hangings, and dresses, with their trimmings of "a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, upon the hem," and "holy ointment," and "perfume," etc., etc. (Ex. xxv.—xxx.). After the making of stars and suns it seems but poor work to give directions about "loops," and "taches," and a "curious girdle," fitter employment for a cabinet maker and a tailor than for a god with "thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud."

While Moses and the Lord were discoursing on upholstery the people were getting into trouble down below, and god, who is "without passions," (Art. 1) felt his wrath "wax hot against them" (Ex. xxxii., 10). Moses did not ask for forgiveness on the ground of god's goodness, but he appealed to his vanity, and reminded him that the Egyptians would crow over him if he destroyed his own people (xxxii., 12.) Thereupon god, who is not a man "that he should repent" (Numb. xxiii., 19), "repented of the evil which he thought to do" (Ex. xxxii., 14). God who is "without body" (Art. 1) had written two tables with his "finger" (Ex. xxxi., 18), and these tables "were the work of god, and the writing was the writing of god" (xxxii, 16). So careless was Moses of this unique specimen *that he lost* his temper and broke it in pieces, and then,

arriving at the camp, he sent the sons of Levi through the camp, bidding them "slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor," and when 3,000 men had fallen he bade the murderers: "Consecrate yourselves to-day to the Lord, even every man upon his son and upon his brother, that he may bestow a blessing upon you" (vv., 27—29). Yet it is blasphemy to deny that this great wickedness was god-inspired.

It is blasphemy to deny that "the Lord spake unto Moses face to face" (Ex. xxxiii., 11); also it is blasphemy to deny that god told Moses: "Thou canst not see my face, for there shall no man see me and live" (v. 20, compare with ch. xxiv., 10, 11). And while it is blasphemy to deny that god is "without parts" (Art 1), it is equally blasphemy to deny that he has "back parts" (Ex. xxxiii., 23). Either the Prayer Book or the Bible clearly needs revision; meanwhile it is blasphemy to deny either.

It is interesting to observe the fashion in which Christians pick and choose among the commandments given "by divine authority" while they imprison heretics for attacking those of which they, in their turn, disapprove. Thus we have (Ex. xxxv., 2, 3): "Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you a holy day, a sabbath of rest to the Lord; whosoever doeth work therein shall be put to death. Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the sabbath day." The Sabbatarians quote verse 2 as a reason for shutting up all museums and art galleries on "the Lord's day," and they abuse as rebels against the law of god all the liberal-minded of their own creed. But they quietly ignore verse 3, because that would cause discomfort to themselves, and the very peers who, in the House of Lords, vote to shut working men out of art education go home to sit over their comfortable fires, and to wander through their own galleries warmed by a fire kindled against their god's direct command. Wonderful, indeed, are the ways of religious men!

The book of Leviticus is "of divine authority." It is blasphemy to deny that a bullock, flayed and cut into pieces and burned, makes a sweet smell to god (Lev. i., 5—9). Tastes differ. Also burning a goat, with "the fat that *covereth the inwards*, and all the fat that is upon the inwards, *and the two* kidneys, and the fat that is upon them,

which is by the flanks" (iii., 14, 15), makes a sweet savor as it frizzles and drips. The tabernacle of the congregation must have smelt like the kitchen of a dirty cook. Yet it is blasphemy to deny that god enjoyed it. "All the fat is the Lord's" (16). Not a morsel of fat might the Israelite eat (17). Personally, I should have been quite willing to give all the fat to the Lord, but some of the people probably felt envious.

It would be wearisome to recite all the extraordinary commands given by god in this "third book of Moses." Christians disregard them, on the pretence that the ceremonial law is not binding on them, yet it is blasphemy to deny that "whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. v., 19).

It is blasphemy to deny that the hare chews the cud (xi., 6); as a matter of mere fact it does nothing of the kind. It is blasphemy to deny that the locust, the beetle, and the grasshopper have more than four feet (xi., 21—23); as a matter of fact they each have six. It is very awkward when fact and faith clash in this numerical fashion.

It is blasphemy to deny that god concerns himself with the way a man cuts his beard; "neither shalt thou," says he, "mar the corners of thy beard" (xix., 27). Is it conceivable that the creator of the universe should trouble himself with such barber's work as this? If such a being existed would it not rather be blasphemy to ascribe such directions to him?

It is blasphemy to deny that Jahveh, like other gods of his time, commanded human sacrifice. He says: "No devoted thing that a man shall devote unto the Lord of all that he hath, both *of man* and beast, and of the field of his possession, shall be sold or redeemed; every devoted thing is most holy unto the Lord. None devoted which shall be devoted *of men* shall be redeemed, but *shall surely be put to death*" (xxvii., 28, 29). This abomination is commanded by divine authority, and he is in danger of gaol and damnation who shall honestly repudiate the detestable thing.

It is blasphemy to deny that Jahveh ordained the disgusting *trial* of a wife suspected of infidelity which is related *in Numbers* v., 12—31. If the "spirit of jealousy" come

on a man, he is to bring his wife to the priest. "And the priest shall take holy water in an earthern vessel; and of the dust that is in the floor of the tabernacle the priest shall take, and put it into the water;" this delectable but dirty drink is to be swallowed by the woman, after a charm has been repeated by the priest, as "an oath of cursing," and if the woman has been unfaithful the water will have very unpleasant physical results, while if the suspicion of her husband be false "she shall be free." This prompt way of settling matters would obviate all the expenses and formalities of a divorce court, and if the arrangement could be extended to include unfaithful husbands, this Christian country would be saved much cost. But though the Christians punish other people for unbelief they are thorough infidels themselves in all practical matters. They would far rather trust Sir James Hannen than dirty holy water, when they suspect conjugal infidelity.

It is blasphemy to deny that Jahveh was so passionate (God is without passions, Art. I.), and so vain that he could only be restrained from smiting his people by the appeal of Moses to his vanity: "Then the Egyptians shall hear it .... and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land .... the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying: Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which he sware unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness" (Numbers xiv., 12—16). This suggestion, most ingeniously introduced by Moses — who "managed" Jahveh with admirable tact — proved successful, and "the Lord said, I have pardoned according to thy word" (v. 20). Yet it is blasphemy to say that god changes his purpose.

Furthermore, although it is blasphemy to deny that "he is faithful that promised" (Heb. x., 23), yet we must believe that Jahveh declared to the Israelites, "ye shall know my breach of promise" (Numbers xiv., 34).

It is blasphemy to deny that Jahveh commanded that a man who "gathered sticks upon the sabbath day" (xv., 32—36) should be stoned to death. Yet is it equally blasphemy to deny that Jesus, the representative and first-begotten of Jahveh, condemned the Pharisees who declared *that his disciples* did "that which is not lawful to do upon *the sabbath day*" (Matt. xii., 2), when they gathered corn.

The poor Pharisees tried to obey the law as given by Jahveh; their reward was to be condemned by his son. Yet it is blasphemy to deny that "I and my Father are one" (John x., 30).

It is blasphemy to deny that Jahveh commanded the Israelites to "make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a riband of blue: and it shall be unto you for a fringe" (Numbers xv., 38, 39). It is hard to believe, though it is blasphemy to deny, that the "Eternal Spirit" troubled himself about "a fringe."

It is blasphemy to deny that there is a "pit," within the earth, into which people may fall alive, when the earth opens her mouth and swallows them up; further, that Korah, Dathan and Abiram, their wives, their sons and their little children, were so swallowed up, and "went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them" (Numb. xvi., 27—33).

It is blasphemy to deny that a plague so fierce that it slew 14,700 people in a few hours could be stopped by a man with a censer full of incense who "stood between the dead and the living" (xvi., 46—49). One can only suppose that the plague advanced steadily across the camp, like a fog, killing every person it covered. Thus only could a man stand between the living and the dead. Yet no such advancing destruction is known to history.

It is blasphemy to deny that a dry old rod belonging to Aaron blossomed miraculously when eleven other dry old rods behaved in the normal fashion (xvii., 2—9). And not only did Aaron's rod bud and blossom, but it also yielded almonds, and this all in the course of one night. It is blasphemy to suggest that Moses, Aaron's brother, who took the rods and who hid them "before the Lord in the tabernacle of witness," quietly substituted a blooming and fruiting branch in the place of his brother's rod, and yet this would be the explanation which would be at once suggested if a similar trick were played now-a-days. But in those easy-going and credulous times very little skill was needed to impose upon a crowd ready to be deceived.

It is interesting to note, in passing, the admirable provision made by *Jahveh*—through the mouth of his servant, Moses—*for Aaron* and his family. "All the best of the oil, and

all the best of the wine, and of the wheat, the first fruits of them which they shall offer unto the Lord, them have I given thee. And whatsoever is first ripe in the land, which they shall bring unto the Lord, shall be thine" (Numb. xviii., 12, 13). This claim on the part of the priesthood has never been regarded as part of that ceremonial law which has been "done away in Christ."

The story of Balaam is one of the tests to which true faith must be submitted. We learn in this that when Balak sent to ask Balaam to go to him that he might curse Israel, god at first commanded him not to go (Numbers xxii., 12), but a little later commanded him to go (20). God, as we know, never changes. When Balaam obeyed god's command and went, "god's anger was kindled against him because he went" (22), that is because Balaam did what god told him to do, and "the angel of the Lord stood in the way for an adversary against him." Balaam was riding on a donkey, and the donkey saw the angel, though no one else did, "and the ass turned aside out of the way." Again the angel placed himself in front of the donkey, and the donkey squeezed past him, crushing Balaam's foot against the wall. For the third time the angel confronted the donkey, and on this occasion in a narrow place, "where there was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left." Then the donkey tumbled down. Balaam was, not unnaturally, disturbed at his donkey's extraordinary behavior, and he had struck her each time that she had, as he thought, misbehaved. And now occurred a wonderful thing. "The Lord opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times? And Balaam said unto the ass, Because thou hast mocked me: I would there were a sword in my hand, for now would I kill thee. And the ass said unto Balaam, Am not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine unto this day? was I ever wont to do so unto thee? And he said, Nay." Sensible persons are expected to believe this absurd story of a conversation between a man and a donkey. Peter speaks of it without any expression of doubt, saying: "the dumb ass, speaking with man's voice, forbad the madness of the prophet" (2 Peter ii., 16). *It is blas*phemy to deny it; it is madness to believe it. *Balaam's* ass stands on a level with Mahomet's,

and only the credulous and superstitious can yield credence to the stories of either.

It is not worth while to delay over Balaam's rhapsodies, except to note their extreme inaccuracy. "God is not a man that he should lie" (Numbers xxiii., 19); yet "I, the Lord, have deceived that prophet" (Ezech. xiv., 9). "Nor the son of man that he should repent" (Numbers xxiii., 19); yet "it repented the Lord that he had made man" (Gen. vi., 6). "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel" (Numbers xxiii., 21); yet, "I have seen this people, and behold it is a stiff-necked people;" "how long will this people provoke me?" (Exodus xxxii., 9, and Numbers xiv., 11). This declaration is the more startling when we find Moses—whose acquaintance with the people was more intimate than that of Balaam—saying: "Remember, and forget not, how thou provokedst the Lord thy God to wrath in the wilderness; from the day that thou didst depart out of the land of Egypt, until ye came unto this place, ye have been rebellious against the Lord. . . . . Ye have been rebellious against the Lord from the day that I knew you" (Deut. ix., 7 and 24). It is needless to accumulate these contradictory statements, all of which we are commanded to believe on peril of damnation.

Immediately after Balaam's declaration of Israel's holiness, we read how the people reverted to idolatry, and how "the anger of the Lord was kindled against them" (Numbers xxv., 3). Some more murders were committed to pacify Jahveh, and he himself slew 24,000 by a plague.

In Numbers xxxi. we have one of the most horrible stories related even in the Bible, the story of the slaughter of the Midianites. Jahveh sent his tribes against this unhappy race, and, after their usual wicked fashion, they "slew all the males." Moved, however, by an unwonted touch of pity, they "took all the women of Midian captives, and their little ones," and brought them alive back to their camp. Moses, Jahveh's friend, "was wroth with the officers of the host" for their unworthy humanity, and shrieked out in his rage: "Have ye saved all the women alive?" And then he commanded them to "kill every male among the little ones, and *kill* every woman" that had been married, "but *all the women* children that" were virgins "keep alive for

yourselves." This bloodthirsty and loathsome command is of "divine authority." It is blasphemy to deny that it was god-given. Yet what of the blasphemy that ascribes an order so fiendish to "the God of the spirits of all flesh?" These baby boys and prattling children, kill every one; these mothers and matrons of Midian, murder them one after another. Such is the command of Jahveh, who said: "Thou shalt not kill." And these fair and pure maidens, these helpless women-children, whose natural guardians ye have slain, keep these for the satisfactions of your passions. Such is the command of Jahveh, who said: "Thou shalt not commit adultery."

Some of these fair girls were claimed as "the Lord's tribute," 352 in all. These were handed over to the Levites, and small doubt can be felt as to their fate.

To add a touch of the comic to this tragic scene, we learn that after all the fighting and the slaughter, not one solitary Israelite was missing, while the Midianitish nation, of which not a male was left alive, turns up again later as merrily as though it had never been destroyed, and "prevailed against Israel, and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strongholds" (Judges vi., 2).

The book of Deuteronomy is awkward for the true believer, because it is a recital of the story related in the preceding book, and constantly contradicts the previous narrative. Thus Moses commands Israel to make no likeness or similitude of Jahveh on the ground that when he spake to them "out of the midst of the fire," "ye heard the voice of the words but saw no similitude" (Deut. iv., 12); yet turning back we read that seventy-four of them "saw the god of Israel, and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness. And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: also they saw God" (Ex. xxiv., 10, 11). It can scarcely be pretended that when they saw a visible being with "feet" and a "hand," they "saw no similitude."

In Deut. v., 15, the reason for keeping holy the sabbath *day is* different from the reason given in Ex. xx., 11. Both *of these* are given as the very words of Jahveh, spoken *from* "*Horeb*" or "Sinai." One of the versions must

be inaccurate, yet it is blasphemy to deny either. In Deut. v., 22, Moses says that after the ten commandments "he added no more." In Exodus he added a large number of other commands (see xx.—xxiii.).

We learn in Deut. viii., 4, that during the forty years wasted in the wilderness "thy raiment waxed not old upon thee." This was very satisfactory for the adults, but what happened to the growing children? The raiment of a week-old baby can scarcely have been suitable to the man of forty; did the clothes grow with the body, and as the numbers of the people increased very much during the forty years, were new clothes born as well as new babies? If such questions are regarded as blasphemous, I can only answer that they are suggested by Moses' assertion of the remarkable durability of the raiment, and raiment that did not become old might surely also grow and reproduce itself. Once begin miracle-working on old clothes, and none can say how far it may go.

It is blasphemy to assert that it is wrong to swear, for the Bible commands: "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God . . . . and swear by his name" (Deut. x., 20). It is blasphemy to assert that it is right to swear, for the Bible commands: "Swear not at all" (Matt. v., 34).

Deuteronomy xiii., from the first verse to the last, is a disgrace to the book in which it is contained, and a scandal to the community which permits it to be circulated as of divine authority. Yet it is blasphemy to attack it and to show its horrible atrocity. If a prophet or dreamer arise and try to turn away the Hebrews from Jahveh, then they are told: "The Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God" (v. 3). Yet, although it is Jahveh's own doing, that unfortunate "prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death" (v. 5). The same fate is to befall "thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul" (v. 6), if such try to turn any away from Jahveh's worship; with a refinement of cruelty, devilish in its wickedness, "thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death" (v. 9). The wife, passionately loved, is to see her husband, in whose bosom she has lain, raise his hand against her, foremost of a howling mob, greedy for her blood. *The daughter is to* clasp her father's knees in vain; he must

strike her down as she clings to him in her agony. The trusting and trusted friend is to be betrayed to the slaughterers, and the hand most closely grasped in love is to be the first to catch up the heavy stone and to beat out the faithful life. And it is blasphemy to cry out against this horror, but not blasphemy to ascribe its invention to the god "whose tender mercy is over all his works."

The murder commenced in the family circle is to be continued in the national policy. If a city of the Hebrews reject Jahveh, "thou shalt surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly, and all that is therein, and the cattle thereof, with the edge of the sword" (v. 15); nothing is to escape, a burning bloodstained ruin is to be left "for the Lord thy God" (v. 16), and then Jahveh will bless his brutal servants, who have done "that which is right in the eyes of the Lord thy God" (v. 18). This command is of divine authority, and has been largely obeyed in Christendom, but people have fortunately become too civilised to carry it out now.

In Deut. xiv., some of the natural history blunders of Lev. xi. are repeated. It is confusing, however, after reading in Lev. xi., 21—23, "these may ye eat, of every flying creeping thing," etc., to find in Deut. xiv., 19, "Every creeping thing that flieth is unclean unto you; they shall not be eaten." So that the Israelites are deprived of those remarkable four-legged locusts, beetles and grasshoppers which "have legs above their feet." (Do other animals carry their feet above their legs?) It is delightful to find Moses speaking of a bat as a bird; clearly in those days the schoolmaster was not abroad, but it is hard that we should be compelled to choose between the blasphemy of speaking of the bat as a mammal, and the falsehood of treating it as a bird. A beautiful touch of generosity is to be found in v. 21: "Ye shall not eat of anything that dieth of itself; thou shalt give it unto the stranger that is in thy gates, that he may eat it; or thou mayest sell it unto an alien."

The general law of warfare laid down in Deut. xx., 10—15, is brutal in the extreme. If any foreign city ventures to *defend* itself against Hebrew aggression, and closes its gates *against the invader*, then it is to be besieged, and "when

the Lord thy God hath delivered it into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword." A yet worse fate is to be dealt out to the cities of Palestine, for in these "thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth" (v. 16). Of course such method of war has nothing surprising, when we consider the cruelty and barbarism of the Eastern nations of which the Hebrews were one, but it *is* surprising that in the nineteenth century the bloody customs of a savage tribe should be set forth as founded on "divine authority."

If possible, still viler is the treatment of captive women; when thou "seest among the captives a beautiful woman, and hast a desire unto her that thou wouldst have her to thy wife; then thou shalt bring her home to thine house . . . . and after that thou shalt . . . . be her husband, and she shall be thy wife. And it shall be if thou have no delight in her," thy passions being satisfied, "then thou shalt let her go whither she will" (Deut. xxi., 11—14). No wonder that prostitution is rife in every Christian city, when this command is placed before young men's eyes as "of divine authority." Similar low views are taken in Deut. xxiv., 1. While this degrading teaching is that of Jahveh, Manu, a mere man, with no "divine authority," but with only a human heart, taught his followers to treat every aged woman as their mother, every young woman as their sister.

It is rather odd to note in passing that he is declared to be cursed who marries "his sister, the daughter of his father, or the daughter of his mother" (Deut. xxvii., 22), when we remember that Abraham said of his wife Sarah: "Indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife" (Gen. xx., 12). Thus Abraham, who is so highly blessed in one part of god's word, is cursed in another.

The book of Joshua is taken up with the bloody wars of the Israelites; it is a mere record of savage butchery; every page reeks with slaughter. "They utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword" (Josh. vi., 21). This, repeated *ad nauseam*, is the book of Joshua. The tale is varied now and then with the record of absurd miracles, as that of the falling down of the walls

of Jericho, or the standing still of the sun and moon at the command of Joshua. From its ferocity and absurdity, the book is beneath contempt, yet it is of "divine authority."

In the Book of Judges we have the record of a number of utterly unimportant victories and defeats in the history of the Hebrew nation. Why should these be accepted as "of divine authority" any more than any corresponding history of some other equally obscure and barbarous people?

Over the barbarous stories of Ehud stabbing Eglon, with its disgusting details (iii., 21, 22); of Jael murdering her guest, in defiance of all desert laws of hospitality, and receiving for her treachery the blessing of the Lord, a blessing shared only with Mary, the mother of Jesus (v. 24, compare Luke i., 28); of Gideon and of Abimelech, with the evil spirit sent by god (Judges ix., 23); of Jephthah and his vow and his sacrifice of his daughter (xi., 29—39), as Agamemnon sacrificed Iphigenia; of Samson with his absurd and brutal conduct (xiv., 19; xv., 4, 5; and 14—19, etc.); of the Levite and his concubine, and the foul details thereon (xix.)—what can any say of these save that such coarse and brutal stories belong to the childhood of every nation, and that while other peoples look back on their savage history as a thing that is past, these Hebrew stories are preserved in perennial freshness, and are placed as a burden on the consciences of the civilised nations of Europe, and, to our shame, are defended from criticism by the brutal laws of blasphemy invented in savage times and sanctioned in England to-day.

The books of Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah are interesting for the light they throw on the growth of the Israelitish people, but regarded as of divine authority, they give manifold occasion "for the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme."

Thus we read how the "ark of God" was carried to battle, and how the Philistines were afraid, and asked: "Who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty Gods?" But they wisely determined to try and save themselves, and bade each other: "Quit yourselves like men, and fight." So they overcame Israel and his "mighty Gods," and took the ark itself captive (chap. iv.). Jahveh, however, if he could not fight the Philistines, was strong *enough to fight their* gods, and when he was offered the

hospitality of Dagon's temple, and was left quiet for the night, he knocked poor Dagon down. The Philistines put Dagon up again, and this so annoyed Jahveh that on the following night he knocked Dagon down again, and cut off his head and "the palms of his hands" on the threshold. After that Jahveh performed a miniature edition of the plagues of Egypt in the various towns to which his ark was carried, until some clever priests hit upon the idea of putting the ark on a cart and harnessing in two milch kine, and letting them go wherever they pleased. Off marched the kine to Bethshemesh, and there they met the fate of all the unlucky creatures that did Jahveh any service, for the men of Bethshemesh took them and offered them as "a burnt offering to the Lord." Then Jahveh broke out on the poor men of Bethshemesh, and killed 50,070 of them, because they (all of them?) had peeped into the ark (chaps. v., vi.). And it is actually blasphemy to deny any detail of this absurd story.

1 Samuel xv. is a chapter that many a pious soul must wish blotted out from the Old Testament. Samuel, as bloodthirsty as Moses, gave in "the Lord's" name the horrible command: "Go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass" (v. 3). This fiendish command was not wholly obeyed, for Saul saved the king, and the best of the sheep and of the other animals. Thereupon Samuel came down and cursed Saul vigorously, and then committed the absurdity of telling Saul that the "Strength of Israel," whose change of purpose he had just announced, and who "repented that he had made Saul king" (v. 35), was "not a man that he should repent" (v. 29). After this manifest untruth, he murdered poor Agag, hewing him "in pieces before the Lord" (v. 33). Yet it is blasphemy to deny that this tissue of bloodshed and lying is inspired by "the spirit of truth."

After this the contradictions about the connexion of Saul and David are of small moment. In chap. xvi., 18—23, David is brought to play the harp to Saul, and he is described as "a mighty valiant man and a man of war," and he became Saul's armor-bearer as well as musician. In the next chapter David leaves him (v. 15) and goes back

to feed his father's sheep, when a war breaks out; a curious proceeding for a "mighty valiant man." Six weeks later David carries some food to his brethren in the camp, and hearing the Philistine giant Goliath utter a challenge, he offers to go and fight him. Saul points out to the man who six weeks before was "mighty valiant" and "a man of war," that he could not fight the Philistine, for he was "but a youth," while Goliath was "a man of war from his youth." David then relates the story of a struggle he had with a curious composite animal, a "lion and a bear," who stole a lamb, and "I went out after him and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth, and when he arose against me I caught him by the beard and slew him." Saul then put his armor on him, but the former armor-bearer and man of war had forgotten how to use armor, and refused to wear it. He then killed the Philistine, and Saul, in whose court he had lived six weeks before, and who "loved him greatly" (xvi., 21), asked one of his captains who he was, and bade him "inquire whose son the stripling is" (xvii., 55, 56). We can only understand the king's loss of memory when we think how much changed David was; the "man of war" had become a "stripling," the "mighty valiant man," the armor-bearer, had changed into a "youth" who could not wear armor. No wonder poor Saul was puzzled, and if he could not understand it when he was on the spot, how cruel to threaten us with imprisonment and damnation if we blunder about it 3,000 years afterwards. Almost immediately after David is playing away on his harp "as at other times" (xviii., 10).

The bloodthirsty, treacherous, profligate character of David is so well known that I will not deal with it here, further than to call attention to the fact that this deep-dyed criminal was the man "after God's own heart," the man who "did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite" (1 Kings xv., 5).

There is one grave difficulty of identity that meets us here which we must not overlook. In 1 Sam. xxiv., 1, we read: "The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, *and he moved* David against them to say: go number *Israel and Judah.*" In 1 Chron. xxi., 1, we read: "And

Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel." Are "God" and "Satan" convertible terms? It is clearly blasphemy to say that they are not, since the above verses prove that they are, yet I fancy it must be blasphemy to say that they are.

The barbaric magnificence of the temple built by Solomon is fully described in 1 Kings vi.—viii., and we are bound to believe that Solomon offered up 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep! It would scarcely have been possible for him to have killed more than one animal in five minutes, for each corpse would have to be dragged away to make room for the next, and this is supposing that others prepared the dead animals for sacrifice. Yet at this rapid rate, without stopping for food or rest or sleep, it would have taken Solomon 11,833 hours and 15 minutes to complete his task, or 493 days. As he must have stopped for food and sleep we may double this time, and a pleasant $2\frac{3}{4}$ years poor Solomon must have passed.

Numberless contradictions may be found in these historical books, but I pass over them all at present, as well as over the succeeding books until we come to the prophets, for to these I must devote the remainder of the space allotted to this part of my subject. We may note in passing the ludicrous absurdity of the headings, "reciprocal love of Christ and his Church," etc., put by commentators over the sensual and suggestive descriptions of male and female beauty in the amorous "Song of Solomon."

Isaiah is by far the finest and least objectionable of the seventeen prophets whose supposed productions form the latter part of the Old Testament. A distinctly higher moral tone appears in the writings called by his name, and this is especially noticeable in the "second Isaiah," who wrote after the Babylonish captivity. There is also much fine imagery and poetic feeling, and a distinct effort to raise the people above the brutal savagery of animal sacrifice to the recognition that justice and right-doing are more acceptable to Jahveh than dead animals. Jahveh himself has wonderfully altered, and though there are many traces of the savage Mosaic deity, the prevailing thought is of the "High and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose Name is Holy" (Is. lvii., 15).

It seems strange, after reading some of the more beauti-

ful passages, to suddenly come upon such a passage as that in chapter xxxiv., 6—8. Yet all are equally inspired, and must be equally accepted as divine. It is hard to imagine that the coarse indecency of chapter xxxvi., 12, is dictated by "a God of purity." Nor is it easy to see what good Isaiah did by walking about "naked and barefoot" (chap. xx., 2, 3). The completeness of the nakedness is not left in doubt (v. 4). In any civilised community Isaiah would have been taken up by the police. A fresh difficulty is thrown in the believer's way by the statement: "The grave cannot praise thee; death cannot celebrate thee; they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth" (chap. xxxviii., 18). It is therefore blasphemy to say that there is any "hope" for the dead. Yet it is equally blasphemy to deny that the dead have hope of resurrection.

Jeremiah is a most melancholy prophet. He wails from beginning to end; he is often childish, is rarely indecent, and although it may be blasphemy to say so, he and his "Lamentations" are really not worth reading.

Ezekiel is both childish and obscene in the grossest sense. I can fancy how Sir W. V. Harcourt would characterise Ezekiel if he were not protected by law. In the first chapter we are introduced to a wonderful chariot, borne by four living creatures, each of whom had four wings and four faces, and four sides, and they had a "likeness" which was separate from them, for "it went up and down among the living creatures" (chap. i., 13); and the chariot had four wheels, or perhaps eight, for there was "as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel" (v. 16); these wheels "went upon their four sides" (v. 17), which must have been very awkward, and they were full of eyes—what do wheels do with eyes?—and were "so high that they were dreadful" (v. 18); on the top of this conglomeration of four-faced creatures and eyed wheels was a firmament, and on the firmament a throne, and on the throne a man, amber-colored, and fire enwrapped, and the man was "the Lord." And it is blasphemy to deny the truth of this unintelligible jargon of absurdities. Then this man converses with Ezekiel, and "a hand"—apparently minus an arm and a body—brings a book (chap. ii., 9), and Ezekiel eats this "roll" (chap. iii., 1—3), a very indigestible *one, I should fancy.* Then Ezekiel takes a tile, and sketches *a town on it, and* pretends to besiege the tile, and sticks up

an iron pan which he makes believe is an iron wall, and then he lies before it, making a fort and a mount, and bringing battering rams to bear on his old brickbat (chap. iv., 1—4). And it is blasphemy not to believe that this midsummer madness was god-inspired. The remainder of his conduct (vv. 9—15) is too disgusting to mention, and as we are not protected, to print it would bring us under Lord Campbell's Act. The same remark applies to the unutterable nastiness of chaps. xvi. and xxiii. And this is in a book put into the hands of little boys and girls, without one protest from the Home Secretary. After all this we are not surprised to read "the spirit" lifted Ezekiel up in the air, "the form of a hand" taking him "by a lock of mine head" (chap. viii., 3). When we read that Gabriel lifted Mahomet in this manner, we say it is an impudent fraud; when we read it of Ezekiel it is "the very truth of God."

The book of Daniel has been so utterly destroyed by criticism that it would be wasted time to dwell upon it. Yet this book is kept as one of the "prophets," although it has been proved to demonstration that the pretended prophecies were written after the event.

The "minor prophets" deserve a pamphlet to themselves, so full of absurdities are they. Hosea, judging by chap. i., 2, 3, and iv., 1, 2, must have been a man of very indifferent character. His writings have the two characteristics of the minor prophets, indecency and maniacal raving; sexual vice is played upon in a manner that is wearisomely disgusting (see v., 1—13; iv., 12—14; v., 3, 4; vi., 10, etc., etc.). Amos tells us how "the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumbline, with a plumbline in his hand. And the Lord said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, a plumbline" (chap. vii., 7, 8). Amos was always seeing queer things, and "the Lord" was always asking him what he saw! He saw some grasshoppers (vii., 1, 2), and a basket of summer fruit (viii., 1), and the "Lord standing upon the altar" (ix., 1). Jonah's adventures are famous, and it is blasphemy to deny that throwing Jonah into the sea stilled the waves, that a great fish swallowed him, that the fish was a whale (Matt. xii., 40), that he lived in the whale's stomach for three days and three nights, said his prayers there, and was thrown up safe and sound after *living for* seventy-two hours inside an animal! Zechariah

is as bad for vision-seeing as Amos. He sees red, speckled and white horses among myrtle trees (i., 8), and then four horns (v. 18); a friendly angel talks with him (v. 9), and explains matters in a fashion that makes them more confused. Then there is a "man with a measuring line" (ii., 1), and Joshua the high priest "in filthy garments," whom they undressed and dressed up again (iii., 1—5). And there are a candlestick, and two olive-trees, and some pipes which "empty the golden oil," and which are the "two anointed ones" (iv.). Next comes "a flying roll," and then can anyone make sense of the following: "Then the angel that talked with me went forth, and said unto me, Lift up now thine eyes, and see what is this that goeth forth. And I said, what is it? And he said, this is an ephah that goeth forth. He said moreover, this is their resemblance through all the earth. And, behold, there was lifted up a talent of lead, and this is a woman that sitteth in the midst of the ephah. And he said, This is wickedness. And he cast it into the midst of the ephah; and he cast the weight of lead upon the mouth thereof. Then lifted I up mine eyes, and looked, and behold there came out two women, and the wind was in their wings; for they had wings like the wings of a stork: and they lifted up the ephah between the earth and the heaven. Then said I to the angel that talked with me, whither do these bear the ephah? And he said unto me, to build it an house in the land of Shinar: and it shall be established, and set there upon her own base." (Zech. v., 5—11.) Yet if we do not believe this we shall be dammed.

I might heap together yet more of these absurdities, but to what end? Who but a lunatic could have written such incoherent matter? Yet this Old Testament, containing error, folly, absurdity and immorality is by English statute law declared to be of divine authority, a blasphemy —if there were anyone to be blasphemed—blacker and more insolent than any word ever written or penned by the most hotheaded Freethinker.

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